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THE HISTORY OF THE FORT FAMILY IN AMERICA

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*Bill Clark 1-5*  
*Minot, Ill.*

HISTORY OF THE FORT FAMILY IN AMERICA.

Tradition in our family has it that the first Fort to reach America arrived here about sixty years after the Mayflower. His name, as the writer now remembers it, was Roger Fort. I have seen a tracing from the sea chest of Roger Fort, and at one time had a copy of it in my possession, but in moving my office a few years ago this tracing, along with other genealogical data that I had gathered, has been misplaced, and I am not able to place my hands upon it.

Tradition in our branch of the family also has it that Roger Fort settled in New Jersey, and, like many of the old families in this country, it is said that the first Fort to land here was given all the land he could plow around in a day and that that land is now the land upon which either Paterson or Newark, New Jersey is located. There would seem to be some force in this tradition inasmuch as it is commonly known that there are Forts in New Jersey, Governor Franklin Fort, now deceased, and his son, also Governor Franklin Fort, now living and a member of the Reconstruction Finance Commission, (believe), are at the present time residents of the State of New Jersey and possibly descendants of this first Fort who is reputed to have settled in New Jersey. The writer does not know this and is not able to trace his connection to a common source with that of the New Jersey Forts. However, it will be apparent from things that will later appear in this narrative statement that it would seem that there might have been some original common ancestors between the two branches of the family.

The writer will also state that some years ago he received a letter from a gentleman by the name of Jerome Fort of Syracuse, New York who at that time was undertaking to gather up all of the genealogical history of the Fort family in America that he could find. A number of letters were passed back and forth between us, and the last letter received from Mr. Jerome Fort was to the effect that he was not able from the resources at his command to trace the connection between the branch



of the family from which he was descended and the branch from which the writer is descended.

The writer will also state that he has had in his collection of Fort genealogical matter a printed pamphlet from a branch of the family in South Carolina, but this, too, he is unable to find. Another branch of the family is located in/about Chattanooga, Tennessee, and this branch, as we understand it, came from South Carolina. During the Spanish-American War Colonel Robert Boal Fort was camped at Chattanooga and there became acquainted with a gentleman by the name of Fort who was the mayor of that city. Col. Fort secured a considerable amount of genealogical data from the Fort who was the mayor of Chattanooga, a copy of which the writer had and which he cannot now, as before stated, lay his hands upon. Coming now to the immediate branch of our family with <sup>which</sup> he is familiar and upon which he has absolute knowledge, the writer states:

In Richland Township, Marshall County, Illinois, in the Fort-Dever Cemetery there lies buried Benjamin Fort, and his monument bears this inscription: "Born in New Jersey, 1776, Died 1855". On the same monument marking the grave of his wife, Mary, appears the inscription: "Born in Virginia 1785, Died 1856". This Benjamin Fort was the great grandfather of the writer. Benjamin Fort and his wife, Mary, had born to them the following named children: -Greenbury Lafayette <sup>Fort</sup> who lived and died at Lacon, Illinois, and is buried in the cemetery in that city, Sara A. Fort Gapen, Levisa Fort Chandler, and Mary A. Fort Titus who died and was buried at Fairbury, Illinois. The writer believes, but he is not certain, that he has named all of the children born to his great grandfather as above stated with the exception of the grandfather of the writer, to-wit: Washington Dever Fort. Washington Dever Fort was born in 1820 in French Grant in Ohio and died in Richland Township, Marshall County, Illinois in 1873 and is buried in the Fort-Dever Cemetery. He was married once, the name of his wife being Sarah Foster Fort who was born in 1824 and died in 1873 and is likewise buried in the Fort-Dever Cemetery, as above named.



Greenbury Lafayette Fort went into the Civil War as a Captain of Company L, and the writer is not now able to recall the number of the regiment. It was an Illinois regiment, and his company was recruited from among the residents of Marshall County, Illinois very largely. He had charge of all of General Grant's transportation on the Mississippi River and in and about Vicksburg, headquarters being for a considerable portion of the time at Memphis, Tennessee. He was mustered out of the service as a Lieutenant-Colonel, and in after life was known as Colonel Greenbury L. Fort. He held the office of sheriff, circuit clerk, and county judge of Marshall County, Illinois, and for eight years represented the old Ninth Congressional District of Illinois in the lower House of Representatives in Congress. He was <sup>also</sup> a member of the state Senate in the Illinois legislature for at least one term. The Hon. Shelby Cullom for many years a United States Senator from the State of Illinois defeated him in a republican convention for the nomination of Governor of this state.

Greenbury L. Fort was married to Clara Boal Fort. They had two children, Christina, who died in infancy, and Robert Boal Fort.

Robert Boal Fort was born at Lacon, Illinois, and died during the deadlock convention in Springfield, at which time he was state Senator from his district and a candidate for the nomination for Lieutenant-Governor on the Republican ticket. Robert Boal Fort had been mayor of his home town, Lacon. He was never married. Greenbury L. Fort, his wife Clara Boal Fort, and all of his children are now deceased, leaving them surviving no child or children or the descendants of any deceased child or children.

Washington Dever Fort, the grandfather of the writer, a son of Benjamin Fort, was born in 1820 and died in 1873. He is buried in the Fort-Dever Burying Ground in Richland Township. His wife, Siner Sarah Foster Fort was born in 1824 and died in 1873.

There were born of this marriage William Jones Fort who married





Emily Stevens Fort. William Jones Fort was born in 1844 and died in 1912 at Marshalltown, Iowa where he is buried. William Jones Fort was county judge of Marshall County, Illinois and held other local offices. There were no children born of this marriage.

(17) James Madison Fort was the second son of Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort. He was born in 1846 and died June 26, 1932. He was married twice, his first wife being Caroline Clark Fort who was born in 1849 and died <sup>in</sup> 1880. There were born of this marriage Flora Gertrude Fort who was born in 1871 and died in 1872. Arthur Clark Fort, the writer of this genealogical history, who was born in 1872. He has never married. An infant son was also born to James Madison Fort and his wife, Caroline Clark Fort, in 1878 and also died in 1878. The fourth child of this union was Clara Emily Fort who was born in 1880.

After the death of his first wife James Madison Fort married Margaret Ellwood Fort. No children were born of this union. [Arthur C. Fort has been city attorney of the City of Minonk, in Woodford County, Illinois, Master in Chancery of the Circuit Court of Woodford County, Illinois, and county judge of Woodford County, Illinois for three terms.

Virgil Franklin Fort was the third child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort. He was born in 1847 and died in 1848.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was Josephine V. Fort Sweet who was born in 1849 and died in 1930 at Hiawatha, Kansas. Her husband's name was John F. Sweet. There were born of this marriage three children: Harold Sweet born in 1872 and died in 1911, Rolfe Sweet born in 1877 and died in 1913, Dore Sweet, the date of whose birth we do not have, who is still living in Hiawatha, Kansas.

The fifth child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was Mary Alice Fort who was born in 1851 and



died in 1930, having never been married.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was Benjamin Franklin Fort who was born in 1852 and died in 1861.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was John Foster Fort who was born in 1854 and died in 1927 at Bismarck, North Dakota. He had held the office of county judge of Burleigh County, North Dakota, and numerous other positions under the state administration of that state. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, and it is the understanding of the writer that he was eligible to membership in this organization under two different, separate, and distinct lines of descent.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, his wife, was Greenbury Lafayette Fort who was named after his uncle, Greenbury Lafayette Fort who was a son of Benjamin Fort, the great grandfather of the writer. He was born in 1858 and is still living at Minneapolis, Minnesota. He married Clara Fortier who was born in 1868 and died in 1930. There were born of this union two children: Arthur Fortier Fort and George Lafayette Fort who are now both residents of the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Greenbury Lafayette Fort at one time was a cadet at West Point. He did not graduate from that institution. With his brother, John Foster Fort, he went to Bismarck, North Dakota and opened a law office there under the firm name of Fort and Fort. He took an active interest in military affairs in that state as long as he remained there and became a Major in the militia of North Dakota. Later he removed to Minneapolis, Minnesota where he was an Alderman for several terms and for many years was city assessor of that city.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was Caroline Matilda Fort who was born in 1858 and died in 1861.



The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and his wife, Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, was Cora Hester Fort who was born in 1862 and died in 1862.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, his wife, was Joseph Elmer Fort who was born in 1863 and died in 1864.

The next child born to Washington Dever Fort and Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, his wife, was Medora Emily Fort Jones who was born in 1864 and now resides at Pomona, California. There were born of this marriage Mae Jones, Carrie Jones Hadley, William H. Jones, and Earl Fort Jones, all of whom reside in Pomona, California.

The thirteenth and last child born to Washington Dever Fort and Sinor Sarah Foster Fort, his wife, was Charles Thomas Fort who was born in 1865 and now resides in Springfield, Missouri. He married Jenny Martin Fort, and to this union was born Pierre Fort in 1894 who now resides at Kerman, Illinois, Ruby Fort who was born in 1897 and now resides at Kansas City, Missouri, Emily Jane Fort Robinson who was born in 1899 and now resides at Vero Beach, Florida, and Russell Fort who was born in 1906 and resides at Springfield, Missouri.

Pierre Fort who now resides at Kerman, Illinois was married to Minnie Wheeler Fort, and two children were born of this marriage: Pierre Fort Jr., born in 1914, and Carol Fort, born in 1919, all residing at Kerman, Illinois.

Greenbury Lafayette Fort, the son of Benjamin Fort, the great grandfather of the writer, was a lawyer and practiced law in Illinois. William Jones Fort, the uncle of the writer, while never admitted to practice of law was county judge of Marshall County, as above stated, and well versed in law. James Madison Fort, the father of the writer was admitted to practice in the State of Illinois in 1869 and continued a member of the firm of which the writer is a member from the time of his admission to the bar in 1900 until the death of James Madison Fort in June of this year, 1932. The firm name was Fort and Fort.





Foster Fort was a member of the bar and practiced law at Bismarck, North Dakota, as did also Greenbury Lafayette Fort, the uncle of the writer, who later removed to Minneapolis and also practiced law there.

Benjamin Fort, the great grandfather of the writer, and Washington Dever Fort, the grandfather of the writer, if not the very first were at least among the first men who moved their families out on the prairie in Marshall County, Illinois, the early settlements having been along the streams and protected portions of the county, and it was prophesied then that they could not make a living on the prairie. That this was clearly erroneous is proven by the fact that Washington Dever Fort made a living on the prairie for himself, his wife, and the thirteen children who were born to them on Round Prairie, in Richland Township, in Marshall County, Illinois. It is almost one hundred years since the great grandfather and the grandfather of the writer first purchased land in that township, and there has never been a time since when the Forts have not owned land there.













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